

Strategies for Engaging and Representing

Latinos in Museums



American
Alliance of
Museums



Latino
Network
of the
American
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of Museums

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Introduction

This resource is the result of many conversations among leaders, members, and friends of the Latino Network of the American Alliance of Museums—a professional group that advocates for the representation of Latinos in museums and creates opportunities for members to network and collaborate. Over the years, the Latino Network has received multiple queries from colleagues interested in attracting Latino audiences to their museums. These questions highlight a growing recognition of the important role that Latinos play in American society, and also point to the need for more information and resources tailored to the museum field.

Since the creation of the United States, generations of Latinos have made substantial contributions to the development of the country, and as our population has continued to grow, so has our cultural, economic, and political influence. Today, Latinos are the second-largest ethnic group in the United States, representing 18% of the country's population. By 2060, this percentage is

projected to be 28%, or one-third of the U.S. population.¹ Latinos are young, increasingly educated, employed, connected, entrepreneurial, and upwardly mobile in terms of income and consumption.² Latino culture—food, music, sports, and film—is becoming an integral part of mainstream America. And yet, while there are over 60 million Latinos in the U.S., there is still much work to be done to include and represent us in museums.

This document, compiled by a task force of the Latino Network, with the input of several museum practitioners, offers background information and strategies for engaging and representing Latinos in authentic and meaningful ways. It draws from published materials, insights from various institutions, and the personal experiences of individuals who have implemented Latino engagement efforts in museum settings. It is not the first of its kind, nor is it likely to be the last. Many colleagues have worked in this space for decades and their tireless efforts have contributed to the representation of Latinos in museums through exhibitions, programs, and audience engagement. This document draws inspiration from their work and builds on their expertise. The bibliography is a launching point for further exploration.

A key takeaway from this document is that Latinos are not a monolithic group. There is no standard or single approach for engaging or representing us. We are a heterogeneous community with multiple histories, experiences, and identities that vary across generations and geographic regions. This diversity is expressed, among other things, in the variety of terms we choose to self-identify. Our community includes individuals who trace their roots to American Indian, European, African, and Asian cultures; to Spanish settlements that pre-date the creation of the United States; to lands that became U.S. territories in the nineteenth century;³ to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; and to immigrant communities from more than

(1) "Hispanic Population to Reach 111 Million by 2060", United States Census Bureau, October 9, 2018. <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/hispanic-projected-pop.html>

(2) Jeffrey A. Eisenach, *Making America Rich Again: The Latino Effect on the Economic Growth*, National Economic Research Associates, 2016. https://www.nera.com/content/dam/nera/publications/2016/PUB_LDC_Prosperty_1216.pdf

(3) Examples include Florida, acquired in 1819, and Texas, annexed in 1845; or places like California, Nevada, Utah, most of Arizona, the western parts of New Mexico and Colorado, all of which were part of Mexico until 1848, when the U.S. annexed these territories after the Mexican-American War.

twenty countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Some of us were born in the United States; some of us were born abroad. Some of us speak Spanish; some of us do not. These are just a few of the differences that make our identities so multifaceted. As museums seek to engage their local or regional Latino audiences, it is critical that they understand their community's own sense of history, place, and identity, and consider the many intersections of identity and experiences found in each community.

We hope that the general strategies and resources offered here may be useful to all types of museums—and to other public-facing organizations—regardless of their size, content areas, or level of expertise in working with Latino communities. Museums may choose approaches that align with their strategic goals and the needs of their communities to develop specific action plans. In this process, it is fundamental that you work collaboratively with your Latino communities to identify initiatives. Doing so without their input and buy-in will set you up for failure. As you implement new initiatives, we encourage you to evaluate your practice and to share your findings so that others can benefit from your experiences. We need more audience studies and general data about Latinos in museums and this can only happen if museums analyze and share their successes and failures. Our intention is to have this publication be an evolving document that is updated and improved as new research and insights become available.

Recent events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice movements, have put into stark relief the entrenched, systemic inequities that Black, Latino, Indigenous, and other communities face in our nation today. These disparities affect access to healthcare, education, employment, and myriad opportunities for personal and professional growth. How can museums make a difference? How can we harness the power of museums to convene, educate, entertain, and inspire for

the purpose of effecting positive changes in our society? We propose that museums actively and intentionally make space for collaboration and co-creation with communities that have been historically excluded from these organizations. Doing so requires that museums recognize and value these communities, and understand that they are not passive audience members, but custodians of a wealth of knowledge and expertise. We believe that museums have the potential to become more inclusive spaces in which diverse communities see themselves represented and valued as stakeholders and partners, and where mutual understanding and respect across differences can grow and foster a more equitable society.

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Who Is Latino?

A museum's success in engaging a specific audience depends on the effort it invests in understanding that audience's characteristics, needs, and preferences, and also on the organization's level of commitment to cultivating the community beyond its walls. In this section, we highlight aspects of the Latino community that museums need to consider as they seek to engage and represent Latinos.

A key point to address is that Latinos are not a monolithic group. Some would argue that the term Latino, or any of the other broad labels used to describe our community such as Hispanic and Latinx are artificial and meaningless given the diversity of communities they encompass. Why then are there so many terms? It's complicated. In this section we provide a brief overview of these labels and their connotations. It is relevant to point out that these broad terms are not universally liked or embraced by the very communities they aim to represent. Their adoption or rejection depends on the context in which they are used, on the history of specific communities, and on individual preferences. These terms are not used in Latin America or the Caribbean. They are terms that have been developed in the United States. While they can be useful in advancing national policies, discourses, and initiatives, we recognize that identity labels are problematic because they do not convey the full diversity and intersectionality of individuals

and communities. Historically, the search for a term that could encompass all of us has been closely tied to the United States Census. How we are counted and described has important political, economic, and social implications such as access to programs, resources, and funding.

Hispanic. This term refers to people of Spanish ancestry and it is commonly used in regions with long histories of Spanish settlements dating back to the sixteenth century such as California, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, and Texas. While the use of this term in the United States dates back to the nineteenth century, the term acquired a new meaning when it was used in the 1980 U.S. Census to count people of Spanish culture or origin, *as well* as people of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and South or Central American ancestry. In this context, Hispanic was meant to describe an ethnic group thought to share a common language, culture, and heritage, but not a common race. While the new and expanded interpretation of the term was controversial, it was embraced by community advocacy groups and media companies. Over time, it became a useful tool for the communities it meant to describe to gain greater relevancy and political power. Today, Hispanic can refer to people from Spain, to communities with Spanish roots, or to communities from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. Some people may perceive this term as oppressive because it valorizes Spain, and by default, its colonial enterprise in the Americas, but others consider it to be a unifying term that acknowledges and underscores their Spanish ancestry. Individuals who have immigrated directly from Spain are Spanish—this term should not be used to refer to people with other country affiliations or simply because they speak Spanish.⁴

Latina/Latino. This gendered term refers to people living in the United States who have roots in Latin America or the Caribbean. The term's origin is not clear, but its use dates back to the 1960s and

(4) Be aware that in the early twentieth century, newspapers and other organizations in the United States may have labeled Mexican Americans and people of Latin American descent as "Spanish." This may be helpful to those researching the early history of their local communities.

1970s. It was included in the 2000 U.S. Census as an alternate term for Hispanic and it has been included in both the 2010 and 2020 U.S. Census. Latina/Latino is considered by some to be more progressive than Hispanic and appeals to the idea of panethnicity. The term generally refers to people with ancestries in Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. However, people from countries colonized by the Portuguese and the French may also identify as Latina/Latino (but not as Hispanic).⁵

Latinx. This gender-neutral noun replaces the gender-specific markers in Spanish, “o” and “a”, with a neutral “x.” The term was introduced in the early 2000s and became widespread, primarily in academic circles, by the mid-2010s. Reactions to this term have been mixed. Some welcome it because it is a more inclusive term, while others dislike it because it breaks from the grammatical rules of the Spanish language and its pronunciation is unclear. Some pronunciations include “Latin-ex” and “La-teen-x.” A recent study published by the Pew Research Center concluded that only about 3% of Latinos use this term to describe themselves.⁶ However, given its popularity among young people and its growing acceptance in various sectors, we foresee that this term will gain more acceptance and be more broadly used in coming years. There is still significant work to be done within our communities to achieve greater gender equity and inclusion, and the term Latinx invites us all to acknowledge and confront our gender and generational biases, often rooted in patriarchal and intolerant societies.

In this document, meant for a national audience, we have chosen to use the term Latino because it is the term with the most widespread use and acceptance within the community. Do you need to use any of these broad “umbrella” terms? It depends on the characteristics of your community and the scope of your museum’s initiative. Once you identify

(5) Lulu García Navarro, “Hispanic or Latino? A Guide for the U.S. Presidential Campaign,” National Public Radio, August 27, 2015. <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/08/27/34584260/hispanic-or-latino-a-guide-for-the-u-s-presidential-campaign>; and Victoria M. Massie, “Latino and Hispanic identities aren’t the same. They’re also not racial groups,” Vox, September 18, 2016. <https://www.vox.com/2016/8/28/12658908/latino-hispanic-race-ethnicity-explained>

(6) Luis Noe-Bustamante, Lauren Mora, and Mark Hugo López, “About One-in-Four U.S. Hispanics Have Heard of Latino, but Just 3% Use It” Pew Research Center, August 11, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/11/about-one-in-four-u-s-hispanics-have-heard-of-Latinx-but-just-3-use-it/>

the community or communities you want to serve, engage in dialogue with members of such communities to discuss how they would like to be identified. Do not make any assumptions and keep in mind that individual preferences can vary. You can read more about this process in the section titled “Knowing Your Community and Audience.”

Community members in your area may prefer to be identified with terms that indicate their country or place of origin, such as *mexicano*, *puertorriqueño*, *salvadoreño*, *peruano*, *venezolano*, or the anglicized version of these terms: Mexican/Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban/Cuban American, Colombian/Colombian American, etc. It is very common for members of Latino communities to maintain strong cultural ties with their families’ countries of origin through language, food, and traditions, but this varies across generations and may also change depending on an individual’s or group’s level of acculturation to mainstream American culture. Many of us are comfortable “living” in two (or more) cultures at once, which does not mean that we experience these cultures separately. Instead, there is a negotiation that flows with varying degrees of ease into and out of an *in-between* space.

There are additional terms that denote identities in relation to culture, experiences living in the United States, or political empowerment. Examples include Chicana/o (also spelled Xicana/o/x or Chicanx), which are used by people of Mexican heritage who were born in the United States to highlight a cultural identity that is both American and Mexican. This term—popularized during the 1960s civil rights movement—has multiple connotations and, depending on who uses it, and how and where it is used, may be a positive identity marker, or a term of derision. Other terms used by people of Mexican descent include Mexican American, Tejano, and Raza. This diversity reflects multiple identities that are fluid and overlapping.

The term Nuyorican, which combines New York and Puerto Rican, refers to the members or culture of the Puerto Rican diaspora located in or around New York City. Although in the past it was used as a derogatory term to distinguish Puerto Ricans born in the continental U.S. from those born on the island, Nuyorican has been reclaimed to denote a dual identity that acknowledges cultural affiliations to both Puerto Rico and the United States. Another term embraced by individuals of Puerto Rican descent, particularly those living in the U.S., is Boricua.

None of the broad or specific terms we have mentioned here reflect concepts of race, as defined or recognized in the United States. The terms Hispanic/Latino pertain to an ethnicity, not to our geographic ancestries. We can be American Indian, African, Asian, European, or any combination of these socially defined races. This diversity is due to the complex histories of conquest, colonialism, slavery, commerce, and migration in our countries of origin, and may also be due to relationships forged in the United States. Concepts of race are different in Latin America and the Caribbean. So, for many of us, the racial constructs prevalent in the U.S. add another layer of complexity to identity discussions. A 2016 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 24% of all U.S. Latinos consider themselves to be Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, or identify with another type of African descent; 25% identify as Indigenous or Native American; and 34% consider themselves to be multiracial.^{7,8} Today, federal, state, and other official documents give people the choice to identify their race (or races) separately from their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino.

While often described as “brown,” Latinos are also black, white, and every shade in between. However, it is relevant to note that in mainstream and Spanish-language media and advertising, the Latino archetype is often represented as a person who is white or light brown. Rarely are Afro-Latinos or Indigenous-Latinos

(7) Gustavo López and Ana González-Barrera, “Afro-Latino: A Deeply Rooted Identity Among US Hispanics,” Pew Research Center, March 1, 2016. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/01/afro-latino-a-deeply-rooted-identity-among-u-s-hispanics/>

(8) Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Rich Morin, and Mark Hugo Lopez, “Chapter 7: The Many Dimensions of Hispanic Racial Identity,” in *Multiracial in America. Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers*, Pew Research Center, July 2015. https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/06/2015-06-11_multiracial-in-america_final-updated.pdf

represented. This practice, very likely rooted in the entrenched racism and colorism found in the U.S. and across Latin American and Caribbean countries, displays a bias towards light skin, masks our true diversity, and impacts how we are perceived and treated in society. An analysis of how systemic racism operates within Latino communities is beyond the scope of this project, but it is critical that museums be aware it exists. We encourage practitioners to be mindful of how racism (external to or internal to the Latino community) can influence decisions about who you work with, who is selected to speak on behalf of the community, and who is featured in images representing the community.

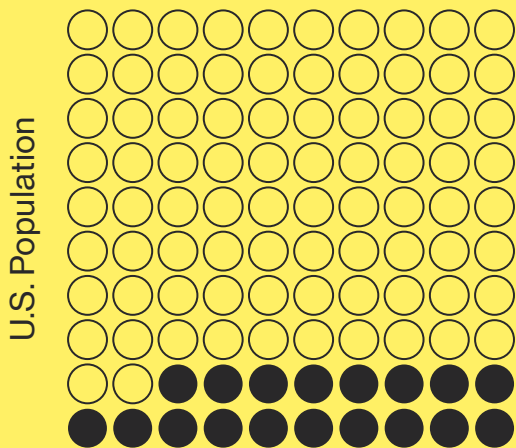
When aiming to engage Latinos in your region, consider their history: How long have they lived in the United States? What brought them to the U.S.? What is their historical and political relationship with the U.S.? The answers may vary widely across communities and individuals. For instance, some of us were here before the United States became the country it is today. We lived in lands that were annexed to the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through treaties, purchases, and war. Some of us are from Puerto Rico, a U.S. unincorporated territory. Some of us came to the United States as temporary farmworkers. Some of us are refugees who came to this country to escape violence or authoritarian governments. Some of us came to this country—like other immigrants before us—seeking freedom, better jobs and education, and new opportunities for ourselves and our families. Some of us are the next generations living this American story. Research the history of your Latino communities. Understanding it will enhance your ability to forge strong relationships and to develop effective engagement strategies.

Another key factor to understanding the community you intend to serve is whether its members speak languages other than English. While the

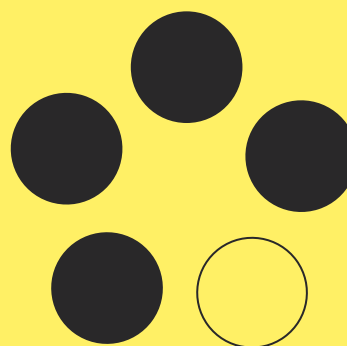
assumption may be that Latinos speak Spanish, this may not be the case. They may only speak English, or they may speak an Indigenous language such as Zapotec or Quechua, or Portuguese, French, or Creole. Assessing language preferences in your local/regional community will help you define the extent to which featuring non-English languages in your Latino engagement initiatives is necessary or useful. Keep in mind that in some regions of the United States, speaking Spanish—or other languages—was looked down upon or prohibited. Also note that some communities may be fully bilingual or trilingual. This document includes a section that addresses how non-English languages can be powerful and positive engagement tools.

The diversity found within Latino communities points to the need for targeted engagement strategies that factor in the characteristics of local and regional audiences. Those tasked to do this work will need to understand and check their assumptions about who is Latino and pay attention to how the local Latino community perceives itself and chooses to self-identify. Remember that within a given region, city, and even within families, there will be variance in how members identify themselves. Conversations about race, ethnicity, color, and identity in relation to Latinos need to become more nuanced. It is also relevant to know that personal and community identity is always under construction—ideas shift, as do the terms associated with them.

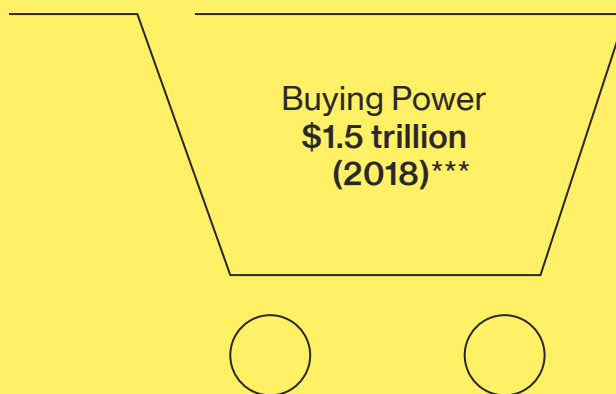
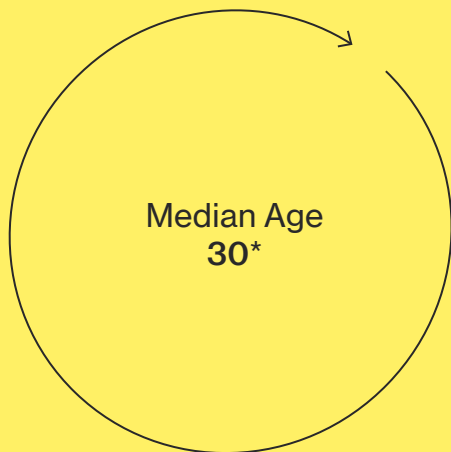
Latino Facts



Four in five Latinos (approx. 80%) are U.S. Citizens**



● Percentage of U.S. population that is Latino: **18% (60.6 million)***



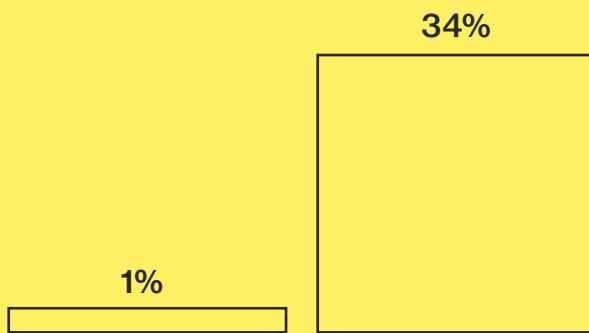
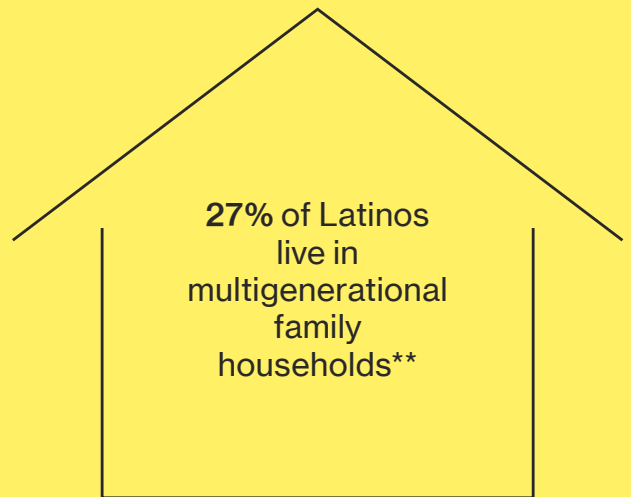
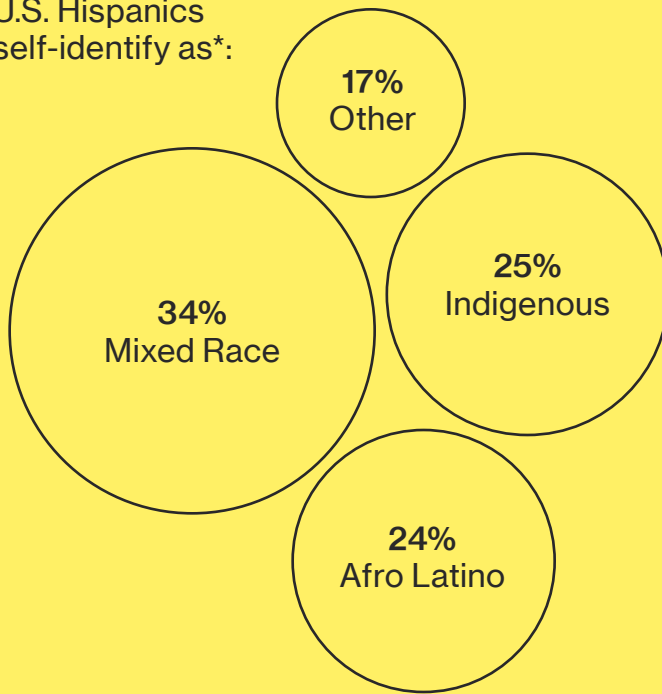
Sources:

*Pew Research Center, U.S. Hispanic population surpassed 60 million in 2019, but growth has slowed, 2020. <https://pewrsr.ch/30oRezF>

**Pew Research Center, Key facts about U.S. Latinos for National Hispanic Heritage Month, 2020. <https://pewrsr.ch/2oH4TEC>

***The Nielsen Company, La Oportunidad Latinx: Cultural Currency and the Consumer Journey, Diverse Intelligence Series 2019. www.nielsen.com

U.S. Hispanics self-identify as*:



Growth of Latino business owners over the past ten years: **34%** (compared to 1% for all business owners in the United States)***

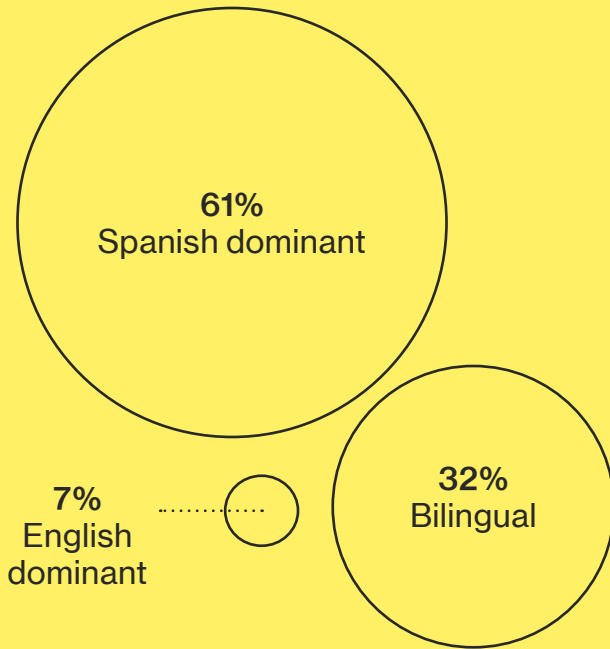
Sources:

*Pew Research Center, "The Many Dimensions of Hispanic Racial Identity," *Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers*, 2015, 98-108. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/chapter-7-the-many-dimensions-of-hispanic-racial-identity/>

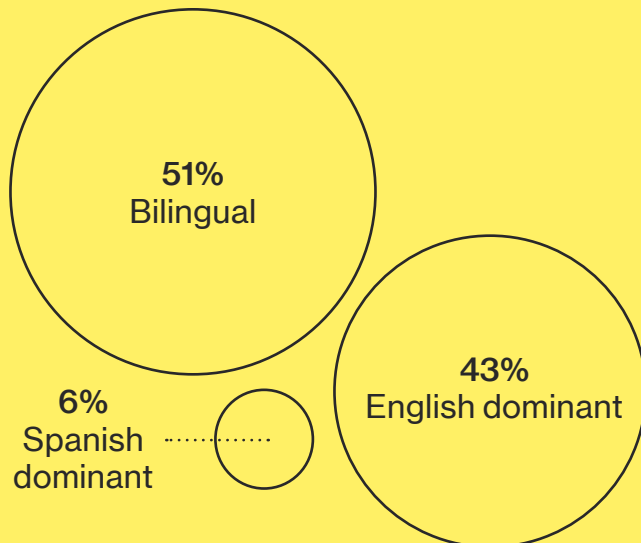
**The Nielsen Company, *Descubrimiento Digital: The Online Lives of Latinx Consumers*, Diverse Intelligence Series 2018. <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2018/descubrimiento-digital-the-online-lives-of-latinx-consumers/>

***Stanford Graduate School of Business, *2019 State of Latino Entrepreneurship*. <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/publications/state-latino-entrepreneurship-2019>

Dominant languages spoken by foreign-born Latinos



Dominant languages among second generation Latinos





Revisiting the Canon

Museums are not neutral spaces. The architecture, displays, collections, and narratives of museums reflect the values, worldviews, and aesthetic preferences of their founders, as well as of their past and present leaders. This means that museums in the U.S. tend to present a Eurocentric, male-dominated understanding of the world. Since the first museums in the United States were established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the country's population has changed dramatically in terms of demographics, values, and access to knowledge. Over the past several decades, many scholars, activists, and museum professionals have begun a concerted effort to broaden the perspective to include women, people of color, and other cultures in our collective history. To what extent are museums embracing and reflecting these changes?

Even though Latinos in the U.S. represent 18% of the population, and land that was previously controlled by Mexico and Spain represents 24% of what is now

U.S. territory, we are still woefully underrepresented in museum collections, exhibitions, staff, and boards.^{9,10} This lack of representation in museums is problematic, as it dismisses our centuries-long presence in the United States and our continuing contributions to the country's history and to the American experience. It also reduces a museum's ability to be relevant to an audience that is becoming larger and more influential. Addressing this problem represents a fundamental challenge for museums seeking to be relevant in the twenty-first century, not only to Latinos, but to society at large.

In our efforts to transform traditional museums into spaces that better represent and serve Latinos, we can learn from the work of museums and cultural organizations created by artists, educators, and activists in response to a severe lack of representation of their experiences and histories in the existing cultural landscape.

One of the earliest examples is El Museo del Barrio, founded in 1969. Based in New York City, this museum was established to meet the needs of parents, teachers, and community activists in Central and East Harlem who wanted their school districts to provide a comprehensive education that addressed their diverse cultural heritage.¹¹ In June 1969, the museum, which was created by a Puerto Rican artist as a community-based organization dedicated to the Puerto Rican diaspora, began operating inside a school room before serving as a nonprofit out of brownstones and storefronts. El Museo has since become a leader in collecting and interpreting Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and Latin American art, serving as an important educational forum that promotes its appreciation and understanding, and its rich contribution to North America.

In San Francisco, Galería de la Raza was created in 1970 by a group of Chicano artists and activists as a place for Mexican American and other Latino artists to show their work. The gallery also served as a

(9) Luis Noe-Bustamante, Mark Hugo Lopez, and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "U.S. Hispanic Population Surpassed 60 million in 2019, but Growth has Slowed," Pew Research Center, July 7, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/07/u-s-hispanic-population-surpassed-60-million-in-2019-but-growth-has-slowed/>

(10) The Texas annexation of 1845 consisted of 389,166 square miles. The Mexican Cession of 1848 (which excluded Texas) included 529,189 square miles, and the annexation of Puerto Rico in 1898 represents another 3,508 square miles. That's a total of 921,863 square miles, which represents 24% of the total area of the current United States. <https://www.census.gov/geographies/reference-files/2010/geo/state-area.html>, and <https://www.global-policy.org/us-westward-expansion/25994.html>

(11) Website of El Museo del Barrio. <https://www.elmuseo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Timeline.pdf>

community arts center and organized youth programs. During that time, other Latino cultural centers emerged throughout California, notably the Centro Cultural de la Raza, founded in 1970 in San Diego, Self-Help Graphics (1970), and SPARC (1976), both located in Los Angeles.

A decade or so later, in 1982, a group of educators began to work on what would become the National Museum of Mexican Art. The museum opened in 1987 in Pilsen, one of the largest Mexican communities in Chicago. The museum was founded to educate and to address social-justice issues. It also showcased Mexican art at a time when other art institutions did not.¹² Today, the museum is one of the eminent institutions dedicated to Mexican Art in the United States and continues to be free for all who visit.

Other organizations of varying size and scope continue to do this work throughout the country such as Mexic-Arte, founded in Austin in 1984; The Mexican Museum, founded in San Francisco in 1975; Museo de las Américas, founded in Denver in 1991; the National Hispanic Cultural Center, founded in Albuquerque in 2000; and the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture, founded in Chicago in 2001.¹³ These spaces can be a source of inspiration and an example of best practices for mainstream museums seeking to embed Latino collections and stories in their programs.

Other efforts not tied to physical spaces have also made valuable inroads in promoting Latino art and culture. Individual traveling exhibitions, such as *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* (CARA), produced by the Wright Art Gallery of the University of California, Los Angeles, and the CARA National Advisory Committee, marked an important moment in the history of Latino art and culture and its inclusion in mainstream museums.¹⁴ The Smithsonian Institution's Traveling Exhibition Service has also produced innovative exhibits, including *Corridos Sin Fronteras*, and *Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program*,

(12) Website of the National Museum of Mexican Art. <https://nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org/content/about-us-0>

(13) More Latino/Hispanic museums can be found here: "Guide to Latino and Hispanic Museums in the U.S." <https://www.milegasi.com/blogs/hispanic-heritage/latino-museums-guide>; and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Latino_museums_in_the_United_States. A list of Puerto Rican museums can be found here: <https://www.discoverpuertorico.com/things-to-do/museums#grid-component>

(14) The exhibition toured ten venues in the US between 1990 and 1993: The Wright Art Gallery at the University of California, Los Angeles; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Fresno Art Museum; the Denver Art Museum; the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History; the National Museum of American Art in Washington, DC; the Bronx Museum of the Arts; El Paso Museum of Art; and the San Antonio Museum of Art.

1942–1964. More recently, *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA* (2017–2018), an initiative spearheaded by the Getty Foundation and collaboratively organized by dozens of cultural institutions in Southern California, made great strides toward promoting a better understanding of Latino art and culture in the U.S. though an ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino Art in dialogue with Los Angeles.

Nationally, the lack of representation of Latinos in museums is problematic. A report commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution and published in 1994, titled *Willful Neglect: The Smithsonian Institution and U.S. Latinos*, found that “The Smithsonian Institution, the largest museum complex in the world, displays a pattern of willful neglect towards the estimated 25 million Latinos in the United States.”¹⁵ Twenty-seven years after the publication of *Willful Neglect*, the Smithsonian has made progress in various areas, including archives, collections, educational and public programs, exhibitions, staffing, and capacity building. These advancements have in large part been due to the Smithsonian Latino Center, founded in 1997, and its Latino Initiatives Pool, a grant-based fund that supports initiatives across the Smithsonian Institution focused on Latinos. The Center also cultivates future Latino museum workers through its Latino Museum Studies Program and community-conscious leaders through its Young Ambassadors Program. It has also actively funded and advocated for curatorial positions in Smithsonian museums to further expand Latino collections, exhibitions, and research. In 2022, the Smithsonian Latino Center will open the Molina Family Latino Gallery—an exhibition space dedicated to the experiences of U.S. Latinos—at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. The incorporation of Latino cultures and history within the broader American narrative is long overdue and shows the Smithsonian’s commitment to include and represent this important sector of the population.

(15) Raul Yzaguirre, Mari Carmen Aponte, *Willful Neglect: The Smithsonian Institution and U.S. Latinos* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1994).

To correct the lack of representation of Latinos in national cultural offerings, a campaign promoting the creation of a National Museum of the American Latino began in 2004, and a commission to study its possible creation was enacted in 2008. Finally, in 2020, Congress approved the creation of the National Museum of the American Latino (H.R. 133, 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act). The Smithsonian is moving forward with assembling the museum's board and conducting a search for a permanent director.

As Steven D. Lavine has argued, museums have the opportunity to become “places for debate rather than absolute judgment, places where differing voices and perspectives are given a hearing.”¹⁶ When museums include diverse voices and perspectives, they will attract new visitors who had previously felt disconnected, intimidated, or confused. The inclusion of Latino voices, perspectives, and opinions validates our cultural importance, creates a different mindset about culture and values, and invites different ways of seeing and understanding. Reimagining the museum with a diverse and inclusive canon at its core can lead to innovation in representation and relevance.

(16) Steven D. Lavine, “Art Museums, National Identity, and the Status of the Minority Cultures: The Case of Hispanic Art in the United States,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2014), 86.

How can your museum better represent Latinos in ways that are more historically accurate, celebrate our diverse cultural heritage, and highlight our achievements?



Knowing Your Community and Audience

How well do you know your local or regional Latino communities? Knowing their history, demographics, and culture will provide a good foundation as you seek to understand their viewpoints, values, and needs. We encourage you to consult people who belong to these communities. They may be staff members, interns, volunteers, trustees, or colleagues from other organizations. **Learn as much as possible on your own before you engage with community members directly. If you have funding, consider hiring a Latino consultant to help you.** Before you launch new initiatives, assess what audiences you are already serving by reviewing museum evaluations or surveys that include demographic data. Once you have more detailed information about your community/communities, you can better assess the needs and expectations of different segments and how your museum can meet them. As we mentioned earlier, the Latino population is not a monolithic group. We have different backgrounds and may have different needs. Having this information will help you benchmark where your museum is now and assess the impact of the initiatives you implement in the future. Remember that this work often takes time. Positive results will come with continued engagement.

Guiding Strategies

Identify existing Latino demographic, geographic, and historical data

Consult state, county, and city level census data to understand the size, location, and makeup of the Latino population in your region; review population reports from neighborhood associations, newspapers, radio, local schools, universities, and think tanks; and research articles in newspapers or journals.

Identify Latino leaders

Artists, business owners, community organizers, educators, students, scholars, and politicians are the influencers who can help build bridges between your museum and the community. Seek to work with leaders who have demonstrated a keen interest in expanding access to culture, arts, and sciences. Aim to compensate the people that consult for your museum rather than of seeking free advice.

Identify and engage local organizations that serve Latino communities

These could be cultural, educational, political groups, legal organizations, nonprofits, Spanish-language media, businesses, healthcare providers, or places of worship. These organizations can provide insights about your local Latino communities, offer resources and communication networks to reach them, and could also be potential partners. Remember that most successful collaborations are mutually beneficial. Museums can provide many benefits to their Latino partners such as free use of space, free admission, and promotion of their events.

Identify community centers that serve Latino audiences

These centers may be managed by local city departments such as libraries and may be interested in partnering with your organization.

Understand to what degree Spanish—or other languages—are spoken in the community

Is Spanish the preferred language? Some Latino communities might prefer English, some may speak an Indigenous language (e.g. Quechua, Zapotec, Mixtec, Nahuatl, K'iche', or other Mayan languages), and some may speak other languages. This may vary depending on whether the community is made up of recent immigrants or if they have been in the U.S. for several generations.

Attend events about issues affecting Latino communities

These may be offered by media outlets, nonprofits, and universities. The more you know, the better prepared you will be to work with your local communities.

Host focus groups and other types of participatory experiences with community members

Aim to better understand how museums fit into their preferred leisure activities, how your museum can be helpful, what perceptions they have of your museum, and what may limit their attendance. If funds are available, these sessions should be

facilitated by someone external to your organization to support a non-biased approach. As you plan them, be sure to think holistically about how to make participants feel appreciated, comfortable, and safe. Be prepared to hear negative feedback about how your museum is perceived. This is valuable information that can help you identify opportunities and challenges as you seek to develop engagement plans for Latino communities.



Organizational Assessment

Engaging audiences that do not visit your organization regularly can be challenging. It is important to evaluate the staff and financial support available for this work to understand both the opportunities and limitations you may face as you introduce new initiatives for Latino communities. An assessment must be undertaken at all levels of the organization and across functional areas: boards, donors, administrative and executive teams, middle managers and department heads, behind-the-scenes and frontline staff, and volunteers. Carrying out this work may require buy-in from leaders, as well as time and financial resources. While formal assessments carried out by external consultants are preferred, self-assessments can be a great starting point.

In some organizations, efforts to engage with Latino audiences can emerge from one person or one department, but to be truly effective there should be an institution-wide commitment that aligns with

the community and the institution itself. **Without a collaborative effort that enlists all departments, effective engagement with the Latino community will be hard to achieve and sustain.**¹⁷ It is equally important to define what success looks like in your organization and to establish a time frame to assess results.

Organizations that are seriously committed to serving Latino audiences—or any other underrepresented group—can benefit from having staff participate in learning opportunities that demystify the “other” and that enable them to work with new communities in a manner that is authentic, respectful, and open-minded. The American Alliance of Museums’ *Facing Change*¹⁸ report provides useful insights for carrying out diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion work (DEAI), which requires institutional commitment, time, funds, and assessments. Without a background in DEAI, it may be challenging to get colleagues on board with Latino engagement, particularly if they are not already aware of us or if they haven’t expressed a genuine and official commitment to DEAI.

While we encourage museum leaders to connect with their Latino staff members to discuss ideas for engaging Latino communities, the mere fact that a staff member is Latino does not mean they have expertise in this field, nor should they be put in a position to serve as a cultural consultant without proper remuneration or professional recognition for their work.

(17) Jill Stein, Cecilia Garibay, Kathryn Wilson, “Engaging Immigrant Audiences in Museums,” in *Museums & Social Issues*, 3:2, 179–196 (2008), 184. DOI: 10.1179/msi.2008.3.2.179

(18) *Facing Change. Insights from the American Alliance of Museums’ Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion Working Group*, American Alliance of Museums, 2018. <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/facing-change/>

Guiding Questions

To what extent are Latino audiences explicitly considered and invited to participate in the development of exhibits, programs, interpretation, education activities, signage, and marketing materials?

Who in your museum is working on Latino engagement? Does this responsibility fall on one department or functional area, or on several areas? To what extent are experiences and results shared with other departments or staff?

What initiatives have been carried out in the past? Who spearheaded them? Were they successful? How was success defined?

What segment(s) of the Latino community have you tried to reach? Families, youth, seniors, professionals, recent immigrants? Who do you want to reach now and how does this outreach relate to your mission?

Do you have Latino collections, or collections that are relevant to Latinos? Do your collecting plans take Latinos into consideration?

To what extent is leadership involved in Latino engagement? Is this work a “special” project or is it embedded in the organization’s work and mission?

Does the museum have an engagement plan for Latinos? How does it fit into the institution’s strategic priorities?

Does the museum have funds to engage Latino audiences? If not, are there fundraising opportunities to make Latino engagement and collaboration an institutional priority? Can you apply for a grant to launch a project?

Do board members support Latino-focused engagement projects? To what extent do they know and care about this audience?

Does the museum have Latino curators, board members, or executive leaders who can influence and shape narratives, strategic priorities, and the ability to hire and raise funds?

Does the museum have Latino staff members? Do you have a program to recruit, retain, and reward Latino talent?

Do they hold positions in which they can influence decision-making? Are there staff members committed to engaging Latino audiences?

Culturally Specific Content

Must museums develop content that is specifically tailored to Latinos to attract them to their organizations? Yes, but not always. It depends on your goals. If your goal is to reach Latino audiences who are currently not visiting your organization, developing exhibitions and programs that represent Latino experiences will definitely be a good first step toward engaging these communities. This type of initiative will signal that you value them and validate the institution as a welcoming space for Latinos. **However, success will depend on the extent to which the Latino content you select resonates with your communities and the degree to which you have removed any real or perceived barriers to access the museum.** Content, by itself, may not always ensure that we will come to the museum. You will always get better results if you actively consult with the community you are trying to reach.

If the Latino communities in your region have never heard of you, do not have a sense of what you offer, and don't consider your museum a top leisure venue, it will be important to first address ways in which

you can become relevant and create reasons to visit. We appreciate exhibitions and programs dedicated to our cultures, but keep in mind that our interests are broader. **Do not assume that Latinos are only interested in Latino content.** We appreciate being part of the overall narrative of an exhibit, as opposed to just being siloed in the “Latino exhibit.” Aim to make all types of content accessible.¹⁹ The heterogeneity of the Latino population can offer many touchpoints to connect with different communities. If organizations can fully embrace inclusion, culturally specific content will be organized with broader themes to make relevant connections across subjects and identities. Museums should think critically and creatively about their approaches.

What content could bring Latino audiences to the museum? This is the million-dollar question. Given the diversity of the Latino population, there is no standard approach, but exhibitions and programs that represent Latino experiences in the United States or relate to our countries of origin are likely to attract Latinos to the museum.

If your goal is to increase Latino engagement beyond community-specific exhibitions or programs, you will need to sustain and continue to offer such experiences or find ways to maintain connections with the community. We encourage you to experiment with community co-creation by engaging Latino artists, content experts, and community members to actively participate in the development of museum programs. This design approach can help your work be truly authentic and meaningful. Keep in mind that co-creation still requires curators and designers to be involved in order to bring cohesion to the visitor experience. **The point is to develop a true partnership between the community and the museum.** Throughout this work, aim to take a holistic approach to integrating exhibitions, programming, promotion, and fundraising.

(19) For more about this idea, see Peter C. Marzio, “Minorities and Fine Art Museums in the United States,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2014), 125.

Guiding Strategies

Invite us to the museum or visit us in our communities and seek our advice

What kind of experiences do Latinos associate with your museum? Are these experiences of value to your local Latino community? In your conversations, present and discuss experiences that you offer or new ones you could create, and request feedback. Are some things resonating more than others? Are there people who are willing to work with you to create content? If so, make sure to pay them adequately for their time and expertise.

Assess your staff

Do they have the knowledge and are they willing to create culturally specific content? If not, consider hiring an external curator or consultant to help with this work.

Assess your collections

Do your collections include objects or artworks that relate to Latinos or their countries of origin? What stories do they tell? Can your museum acquire Latino objects or artworks? Could your museum borrow Latino objects from another institution?

Assess your exhibitions

If you have objects related to Latino histories and cultures, are they displayed in your permanent galleries? Are they part of the main exhibition galleries or are they hard to find? Are you using them to engage Latinos or promote your organization to Latinos? Do you have the capacity to host temporary exhibits with Latino content? Could you showcase temporary or traveling Latino exhibitions?

Assess how objects and specimens were collected, catalogued, and how they are displayed

Consider the voices you invite to catalogue collections and write labels, especially—but not only—for art and artifacts representing a particular culture or people. In what language/languages are the labels presented?

Assess your programs

Do your programs feature Latino content and/or speakers? What types of intergenerational programs can you offer? How can you engage the students and families of predominantly Latino schools in your community?

Brainstorm with colleagues

What opportunities exist to embed Latino content in upcoming programs, or to create new content? Consider all functional areas of the museum: exhibits, collections, programs, and outreach. Be careful to avoid engaging in paternalistic behavior and tokenism, such as limiting yourself to hosting programs during Hispanic Heritage Month. You may want to consider researching holidays and celebrations that are meaningful to your Latino communities.

Consider bilingual/multilingual interpretation and materials


Is it possible for your organization to feature bilingual labels? Do you have the capacity to offer guided visits or programs in another language? Are all your supplemental materials subtitled or translated? You can find more information about this in the section titled “Language as an Engagement Tool.”

Get creative and experiment

Create a targeted task force that can organize more exhibitions and programs that represent the wide diversity of Latino cultures: consider community events, Latino student-art shows, and offsite activities. Have a visible presence in your local Latino communities.

Develop short- and long-term plans to move forward

Seek advice and collaboration from external experts such as consultants who are knowledgeable about Latino engagement, community leaders, scholars, and activists who could help you chart a plan.



Community Collaboration and Outreach

Engaging Latino communities in museums goes beyond on-site experiences; it involves intentional relationship building. To begin and sustain authentic relationships, museums need to know their communities and understand their history, values, and needs.

Most outreach is effective when it is an institutional effort, one in which leadership, staff, and volunteers create and implement a strategic and holistic approach to meet and serve communities in meaningful ways. As noted earlier in this document, it is important to identify how and where to reach Latinos in your region. In some areas there will be schools, neighborhoods, or cities with high Latino populations, but in other areas we will be spread out across the region. Visiting different Latino neighborhoods, businesses, and organizations should be a priority when trying to engage with your local community. Inviting leaders and organizations to meet with you at your institution is important, but we suggest you be proactive and first connect in their spaces.

Here is a set of recommendations on how to get started. It is possible that your institution, one of its departments, or even just one staff member, is already laying out this work and seeing some results.

Community Partnerships

Partnering with a cultural or community-based organization requires trust and common goals. When reaching out, make sure you know the organization and its mission, understand its past partnerships with your institution, and identify potential areas for continued collaborations. As you seek a new partnership, do not assume that the community sees value in it. It may be best to express interest and engage first in discussions about the needs of the community. Listen intentionally to better understand the concerns and needs of community members, as well as how they believe their needs could be addressed. Build the relationship without making an “ask,” to avoid being perceived as transactional. **What you think the community needs may not be what they want.** You will also need to consider whether your engagement strategies will be implemented at the museum or offsite. What are the pros and cons of each approach?

Be sure to offer something of value to your community partners in exchange for their collaboration. This could include compensation for community advisors, free admission, an exhibition of local artists, or a panel discussion on current topics. Center the voice of your partners in this work. Some Latino communities, particularly those with a high percentage of recent immigrants, may be interested in English-language learning opportunities. Public school systems, libraries, and cultural centers often offer such classes. Museums can partner with these organizations to support their classes with the use of collections and/or spaces.

Community centers that operate in Latino neighborhoods may be open to making their spaces available for the museum to present cultural programming or other services. Or vice versa, they may also be interested in using the museum’s spaces for their programs. These centers may also work with organizations that offer free health and legal

consultations, refugee services, or food for those in need. Partnering with one of the community center's providers or with their staff can result in a meaningful experience that will demonstrate to the community the museum's intentions and commitment.

As the museum continues its partnerships with Latino communities, it is important to create sustainability. Seeking to join local committees and internal committees at other organizations that work with Latino families in schools, churches, nonprofits, and community centers is extremely important. You should wait for an invitation, but hint that the museum is ready to be more involved and support the committee. Offering a space in the museum for committee meetings is a good start. This work takes time and effort and museum staff members involved in these partnerships must be prepared to be there, be present, and deliver.

Organizations with whom you have a partnership are good places to recruit volunteers and docents. We also strongly suggest that you invite community leaders to be part of the museum's internal committees such as education, fundraising, and exhibition co-creation. When they are ready, you could ask them to join the museum's board. There are many opportunities for Latino leaders, business owners, and parents to be directly involved with the museum. Remember that your institution has power. Don't be afraid to share it and use it wisely.

Offering activities in community versus museum spaces can have many benefits but may not always be feasible due to staff or funding limitations. The following are a few ideas to consider.

Guiding Strategies

Promote museum offerings and programs in the community

Create promotional materials in the language/s preferred by your local Latino community and distribute through multiple channels to inform the community of your offerings.

Attend community events

Identify public and cultural events offered by Latino-serving organizations and find opportunities to participate. Being a part of these events is a great way to connect with the community. The museum could co-sponsor the event and be featured in marketing materials or get a booth to offer museum materials and information, free passes, hands-on activities for families, or invitations to museum events.

Offer educational programs in the community

Partner with local schools, community centers, libraries, or places of worship that serve Latino families to offer educational sessions related to your museum's content. Make sure programs are accessible in terms of schedule, materials, and cost, and that they are also available to people with disabilities. Many museums provide educational experiences through strategic partnerships with school districts that tie in with the state curriculum and assist educators in accomplishing curriculum standards. If your organization intends to serve immigrant Latino families, investigate options to work with English as a Second Language (ESL,ELL) programs.

Showcase museum collections in the community

Consider lending objects from your teaching collections to community organizations that can bring to life your collections and encourage community members to visit your spaces. Keep in mind that when there are no docents or volunteers around, labels are important. Consider making them multilingual or including a cell-phone audio guide.

Use community projects to draw audiences to the museum

Work created as part of an offsite program could be exhibited at the museum and serve as an opportunity to invite participants and families to visit your facilities.

Consider who represents you in the community

When holding offsite programs, consider which staff members will be present to interact with the community. Does your staff include Latinos or people who can engage with the local Latino community in their preferred language? If this represents extra work for your current staff members, make sure to allocate extra resources and support.

Be flexible and open to new models of engagement that at first may seem far from the traditional role of a museum

Creating social or community spaces is not a new thing for museums, but to be inclusive, museums need to reconsider how their practice invites or excludes members of specific groups.

Access Barriers

Is your institution readily accessible to Latino communities? Access begins with the ability to be present at your museum and is enhanced when the institution is perceived as a welcoming place. It is important to note that familiarity with U.S. museums varies greatly among Latino communities and is influenced by many variables. The access barriers you may have will probably not be unique to the Latino community and may be real or perceived barriers for many other communities. The following questions are meant to assist you in identifying potential access barriers to your organization.

Guiding Strategies

How accessible is your institution in terms of its location?

How far away is the museum from Latino-specific neighborhoods or towns in your region? Can it be reached by public transportation routes? Is the museum located in an area that is very wealthy or not very diverse? Could it be perceived as a place that is not welcoming to all?

Are your current online and print marketing efforts reaching Latinos?

Consider how and where the museum is being promoted. Are you present in Latino media channels, or Spanish-language media? Do you have materials in businesses that serve Latino communities? For more information about language, see the section titled “Language as an Engagement Tool.”

How accessible is your museum in terms of its admission rates?

Do you offer discounts, memberships, library passes, free days, free hours? Are you communicating these offerings to Latino communities? Can you provide free admission to a predominantly Latino school district or provide free passes to community partners? Can your museum offer free admission to public programs or family days? While you shouldn't assume that Latino communities require free admission, cost is often an important access barrier.

Is your wayfinding signage accessible?

If the Latino population you are trying to reach is new to the area, consider that many may not understand English, and for some, literacy in Spanish or English may not be a given. Are your maps and basic signage accessible to non-English speakers? The use of universal design may be vital to this issue. Reach out to other museums or organizations that are implementing such signage. Health institutions and colleges tend to follow these design features and could be a good resource.

How much museum literacy do you expect from your visitors?

How do these expectations influence whether you are a welcoming organization to those with little familiarity with the museum? How can you share museum literacy guidance so that no one feels surprised or left out without being patronizing? What types of programs could you develop so that expectations can be addressed before visiting the museum for the first time?

Do you offer sitting areas for older people, people with disabilities, or children?

Do your exhibits allow for multigenerational groups to gather around and talk about an object or an exhibition? A third of Latinos live in multigenerational homes and may want to visit with family members.



Language as an Engagement Tool

Language is an important cultural connector. Understanding the value of multilingualism to build inclusive spaces is fundamental to engage audiences whose first language is not English. While Spanish is the language most often associated with Latinos, not all Latinos speak Spanish. Some of us only speak English, some of us speak both English and Spanish, and some of us have limited understanding of English. Some of us speak an Indigenous language which may or may not be written, and some of us speak Portuguese, French, or Creole. The big question for museums is whether it is necessary to present content in another language to successfully engage Latinos. It all depends on the characteristics of your current audience and the audiences you hope to attract. Businesses have identified the value of offering customer service support and tools in Spanish, and U.S. government agencies at the federal, state, and local level are increasingly offering information and documents in

a bilingual format. Spanish-language and bilingual content is actively sought out by Latino consumers, in print materials, online, and on television.

What is the value of presenting programs or materials in another language? There are practical and symbolic reasons. Studies have found that the presence of bilingual materials has multiple impacts on visitors.²⁰ On an emotional level, they make visitors feel more comfortable, more valued, and they can change how visitors feel about the institution they are visiting. On a practical level, they help visitors access content in their preferred language, help those who are learning a language, and help adults facilitate museum experiences for their children. However, it is not a matter of just offering the programs in another language, it is about creating the content specifically with an audience in mind, such as a first-time visitor to a museum.

The logistics of presenting information in a different language can be daunting, especially if this is not currently part of your practice. As you begin this work, we recommend that you be patient and open to experimenting. On a superficial level, multilingual initiatives can appear simple if you believe that a direct or literal translation is all you need. **Direct translations can be effective under certain circumstances, but they may not resonate with your community.** Engaging community representatives in the development and the review of content, labels, and materials will help you ensure that the language truly resonates with the communities. Institutions can establish a group for copyediting review of all translated text. It is just as essential to set up a sustainable process for reviewing all multi-language materials.

There are many options on how to start, depending on your staff and financial resources. You can recruit staff and docents to offer guided tours in different languages and promote these opportunities. Programs such as lectures, films, and hands-on

(20) Steve Yalowitz, Cecilia Garibay, Nan Renner, and Carlos Plaza, *Bilingual Exhibit Research Initiative: Institutional and Integrational Experiences with Bilingual Exhibitions*, 2013. https://www.informal-science.org/sites/default/files/2013-10-01_BERI_research_report_Final_Sep_2013.pdf

activities, can be presented in a bilingual format or in another language with the assistance of an interpreter. These opportunities, as well as your general offerings, can be promoted in another language. Just be sure to convey whether the activities you are promoting will be presented in English or in another language and include specifics. Even something as basic as presenting your visitor information (e.g. directions, hours, admissions, parking, food availability, etc.) in other languages can go a long way in making people feel welcome. Audio tours can help offer content quickly and could be made available online so visitors can access them on their smartphones. Ninety-seven percent of Latino households own a smartphone and we are the most active smartphone users of any demographic in the U.S. In the marketing world, Latinos are considered mobile “Super Consumers.” Latino adults also spend much more of their entertainment time with audio and video (69% of total entertainment time spent) compared to the general population (54% of total entertainment time spent).²¹ Digital content needs to be given serious consideration as you plan engagement initiatives. Finally, consider translating labels of current exhibits or creating bilingual exhibitions. Studies of bilingual exhibitions have shown that there are multiple benefits of these projects.

The 2013 report *Bilingual Exhibit Research Initiative* (BERI)²² found that bilingual labels (English/Spanish) assisted with:

1. *Code switching.* A large majority of participants used both Spanish and English, often switching from one language to another, sometimes even within the same sentence.

2. *Generational preferences.* Adults were more likely to read in Spanish, while children were more likely to read in English. Visitors also changed the language they spoke depending on who was with them.

(21) *La Oportunidad Latinx: Cultural Currency and the Consumer Journey*, The Nielsen Company, August 12, 2019. <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2019/la-opor-tunidad-latinx/>

(22) Steve Yalowitz, Cecilia Garibay, Nan Renner, and Carlos Plaza, *Bilingual Exhibit Research Initiative: Institutional and Integrational Experiences with Bilingual Exhibitions...*

3. *Access to content.* Adults (more recent immigrants) valued the ability to access content in their preferred language.

4. *Facilitation.* Access in their preferred language enabled adults to facilitate the experience for their children.

5. *An emotional connection.* The presence of bilingual content made the visitors feel more comfortable, enjoy the visit more, and feel more valued by the institution.

6. *Learning a language.* Many Spanish-dominant adults reported trying the English version first, then reading the text in Spanish to see if they understood it properly; in this manner they were improving their English.

7. *Connection to culture.* Participants reported that bilingual text gave them an opportunity to reconnect with their culture. For many Latinos, language is intrinsically linked to their identity.

Deciding to develop bilingual materials should not be taken lightly. It may appear to be easy, but it can be quite challenging.

Guiding Strategies

Assess the experiences your museum has had with non-English language content

What was learned? If you haven't done any work in this area, do you foresee challenges? Understand the real and potential pros and cons of bilingual initiatives.

To what extent can you integrate other languages into your on-site and online offerings?

Think about the basics, such as visitor information on your website, online marketing, bilingual labels in exhibits, and bilingual programming. If your museum does not have much experience developing multilingual content, try small projects and build on those as you gain expertise.

Identify where and when translations are needed and define a clear process to carry out translation work

Identify whether you need an interpretive translation (wall text, labels, and handouts that are sensitive to linguistic norms of language) or a literal translation (basic signage, directions). It is important to create and define a clear process (methodology) for developing and translating content.

Identify the linguistic variety of the language(s) that the museum will use

Spanish, for example, has many linguistic varieties associated with different countries. Some organizations aim to use a “neutral” or “universal” Spanish but removing regional characteristics will be challenging. Therefore, it is important to identify and assess the linguistic variety that will resonate most with your Latino communities. There are many nuances to be considered, so it is best to be open to discussions about the best or most effective language for your institution.

Develop a style guide for materials in other languages

Does the language have a tone? What tone will you use: formal or informal? How will you describe information that shows up multiple times in different places? E.g. admission rates, schedules, etc. Aim to be consistent. Determine which components of your collateral will always be in English, such as your museum's name, address, and credit lines. In addition to creating a style guide, consider creating a Spanish glossary with agreed-upon translations of common terms.

Identify a vetted translator who is a native speaker and who has some expertise in your content areas

The quality of the language you present is especially important. Content that is poorly translated will most likely harm your reputation among Latinos, rather than help you come across as an inclusive organization. If you have staff who speak Spanish, do not assume that they can or should translate museum texts, especially if it is not part of their core responsibilities.

Ask a native Spanish-language speaker to review your translated materials

As with English texts, copyediting is fundamental to avoid errors. Be aware of the financial costs associated with translation and of the time it takes to do this work and be sure to consider these factors in project management. Make sure you add translation services as a line item in budgets for programs and exhibitions.

Ensure that you understand the scope and potential limitations of your bilingual initiative

Are you promoting the museum via Spanish-language media channels while lacking on-site programs or materials in Spanish, or staff who can engage with visitors in Spanish? Do you have bilingual programs but no one in marketing who can promote them in Spanish?

Consider design

How you present bilingual content can influence how you come across to your audience. In print materials and exhibitions, the presence of both languages allows for a vivacious back and forth of languages, which can be heightened through the typography by font choices, alignments, kerning, and rhythm. Aim to make a composition from the two languages, producing an aesthetic effect that validates the importance and beauty of bilingualism.

Understand that this work will take time and will likely involve a lot of trial and error

Engaging and sustaining bilingualism or multilingualism in your museum will take time and will need to be an ongoing effort. Try to make this an institution-wide commitment.



Representation in Staff and Boards

Since the 1990s, there have been valuable efforts to document and tackle the disparity in Latino staff and representation in museums. Among the most notable efforts have been: the Latino Museums Working Group of the Inter-University Program for Latino Research, under the auspices of the University of Arizona and Arizona State University; the National Survey of Latino and Native American Professional Museum Personnel, which took place in 1991–1992; and of course, the Smithsonian Institution’s response to *Willful Neglect*, which led to the creation of the Smithsonian Latino Center and several programs to train and hire more Latino museum professionals. But unfortunately, museums still have a long way to go in diversifying their staff, boards, and audiences. This gap is evident at professional conferences and is well-known within our professional community. The absence of Latinos on museum staff and boards is alarming, and it signals the inability or unwillingness of our organizations to appropriately address social inequalities.

The Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey, published in 2015 by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, reported that the employees of art museums were about 10% more racially and ethnically homogenous than the U.S. population, and that creative and executive positions—curators, educators, conservators, and museum leadership—were significantly more homogeneous, with 84% being white non-Hispanic, 4% African American, 6% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 3% of two or more races.²³ A follow-up study conducted in 2018 and published in 2019²⁴ found that “among intellectual leadership positions, education and curatorial departments have grown more diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, while conservation and museum leadership have not changed.”²⁵

Even in Los Angeles, where, in 2017, Hispanics/Latinos represented 47.5% of the Los Angeles County population, a survey found that only 9% of the arts and cultural workforce identified as Hispanic/Latino.²⁶

Research shows that the most important thing in making Latino audiences feel at home in a museum is Latino staff.²⁷ If Latino visitors are confronted with stereotyping and discriminatory practices, they will not be likely to return, and, even more importantly, they will communicate their experience to their community.

Becoming a culturally inclusive organization, one that can positively engage and represent local and national communities, requires a commitment to ensuring that staff, stewards, and advisors represent diverse experiences and voices. The lack of diversity in the museum field calls for new hiring practices and priorities, intentional approaches to recruit and retain talent, and a new mindset that values diversity.

(23) Roger C. Schonfeld, Mariët Westermann, and Liam Sweeney, *Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey*, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 2015. https://mellon.org/media/filer_public/ba/99/ba99e53a-48d5-4038-80e1-66f9ba1c020e/awmf_museum_diversity_report_aamd_7-28-15.pdf

(24) Mariët Westermann, Roger C. Schonfeld, and Liam Sweeney, *Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey 2018*, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Ithaca S+R, Association of Art Museum Directors, American Alliance of Museums, 2019. <https://mellon.org/news-blog/articles/art-museum-staff-demographic-survey-2018/>

(25) Please note that in these reports, race and ethnicity were reported as a binary, “white non-Hispanic” or “people of color.”

(26) *The Demographics of the Arts and Cultural Workforce in Los Angeles County*, Data Arts and Los Angeles County Arts Commission, 2017. <https://www.lacountyarts.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/artsworkforcedemog2017.pdf>

(27) Salvador Acevedo, and Monique Madara, *The Latino Experience in Museums: An Exploratory Audience Research Study*, Contemporanea, 2015. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/the-latino-experience-in-museums-an-exploratory-audience-research-study>

Guiding Strategies

Practice intentional recruitment

Recruiting Latino staff members, docents, volunteers, interns, fellows, and board members will contribute to making an organization more relevant to its constituents. Depending on your location in the U.S., recruiting Latino candidates may or may not be challenging. It is imperative that you share opportunities through channels that reach the Latino community. Ensure that opportunities are advertised to personal contacts, Latino organizations, media channels, and higher education centers. Be open to considering candidates whose experience may not align with your institutional and/or cultural norms or expectations.

Provide cultural competency training

Provide training about implicit bias, racial identity, and structural racism to recruiters and existing staff members to ensure they are reviewing applications and candidates equitably for staff, intern, or volunteer positions.

Diversify your Board

Much like staff, museum boards are remarkably homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, and age. *Museum Board Leadership 2017: A National Report*, commissioned by AAM and produced by BoardSource, found that 46% of museum boards were all white.²⁸ Participation in most executive boards comes with the expectation of annual donations and social networks that can be helpful for fundraising. These expectations may exclude many individuals who are able to contribute cultural capital but may not be able to contribute financially.

Redefine Board Leadership

Boards will not become more diverse without first changing the idea of what leadership looks like and understanding the talent, expertise, and cultural perspectives diverse leadership that can bring to an organization. Only then can changes in board structures and recruitment practices follow suit. In addition to focusing on recruiting individuals who can provide much-needed financial support, museums can also consider engaging entrepreneurs, scholars, small or mid-size business owners, and local leaders. Boards—whether they are fiduciary or advisory bodies—should update their bylaws to include language that makes it a priority to seek diversity in their membership.

Museums need to reassess who is best suited to advance and support their financial and strategic priorities. Potential board candidates may not be in their immediate professional or social circles, but they will not be hard to find if the museum prioritizes open and inclusive searches.²⁹ Additionally, existing board members should undergo cultural competency training. This will increase the capacity of the board to create an equitable space for new members who do not fit the traditional profile.

Create a Community Advisory Board

Community advisory boards are indispensable for any museum seeking to strengthen its relationships with local audiences. These boards can help develop long-term relationships with community members who might become regular visitors, museum boosters, future interns or employees, annual members, or even members of future executive boards. While community advisory boards can be temporary and often relate to specific exhibits or program series, the relationships they foster are not disposable and require sustainability if the museums' community engagement efforts are to be perceived as authentic. You should also consider the power structure. If your organization has a community advisory board that is separate

from the governing board, it should address how these separate entities can be equally influential.

Create a Scholarly Advisory Board

There are many professionals in a variety of disciplines such as Latino Studies, Ethnic Studies, Chicano/a Studies, and Mexican American Studies who can provide invaluable information and guidance to your institution. All museums should also consider including experts from cultural centers and research institutions at any board level or have them offer training to your board. They can provide new perspectives on most aspects of U.S. history—including, art, culture, politics, and science—from the viewpoint of the Latino experience. There are also companies and consultants who specialize in helping museums and nonprofits with this work.

(28) *Museum Board Leadership 2017: A National Report*, BoardSource, 2017. <https://www.aam-us.org/2018/01/19/museum-board-leadership-2017-a-national-report/>
(29) Raul Yzaguirre, Mari Carmen Aponte, *Willful Neglect...*

Looking to the Future

Today there is more diversity [in museums] than ever before, but it's still lagging behind corporate America, for example, which I never thought I'd say. So the challenge is for museums to live up to what they say they are, which are places that should model and reflect the best of what they expect from other Americans.

– Lonnie G. Bunch III, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution

While the makeup of museums has evolved in the last several decades, there is still much work to be done. And as we have expanded upon throughout this document, the work includes ensuring Latino representation within museums. The strategies presented here support audience engagement as well as culturally specific content and collections. First voice representation in staff and boards is also underscored. We hope that this document prompts positive conversations and reflections in your museum and helps you identify strategies to bring about change.

As we look beyond 2021, we hope that equity and inclusion in museums become the standard and not a goal. Thank you for your commitment to making your organization one that embraces and serves Latino audiences in a manner that is intentional, authentic, and long lasting.

Here's to the future!

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